

Daily Herald, January 27, 2005

Efforts to capture Osama bin Laden received a shot in the arm with the U.S. government upping the reward on his head and a renewed push to find informants, Congressman Mark Kirk said.

Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, recently returned from a five-day congressional mission to Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he tried to "re-energize" the hunt for bin Laden.

He carried the message that information leading to the al-Qaida leader's capture would now be worth \$50 million. Previously, the reward was \$25 million.

"A \$50 million reward is a great motivating factor," said Kirk, one sponsor of the State Department's Rewards for Justice Program.

So far, about \$64 million has been paid to informants through the program. The largest award was \$30 million paid to the informer who led the U.S. military to deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay.

Kirk said the state department is offering rewards for information leading to the arrest of drug kingpins who finance terror, and people who kill Americans.

"We also made the program much more applicable to rural communities in Pakistan, people who cannot read or write and get most of their information from the radio," he said.

The U.S. government will launch a radio campaign in February promoting the program. Its target audience is Pakistani men, 20 to 25 years old, Kirk said.

Already, a newspaper campaign is under way.

When he visited Pakistan last year, Kirk said, there was no activity with the program.

"So far, just with the newspaper campaign, we're getting about 10 leads a day," he said.

Informants will be able to go to secure sites in Peshawar to offer leads and get protection.

The best educated guess by U.S. military elite is bin Laden is hiding somewhere along the Pakistani-Afghan border.

"I would say that three years ago bin Laden could freely move anywhere in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This year, he is confined to an area of about 2 million people," Kirk said.